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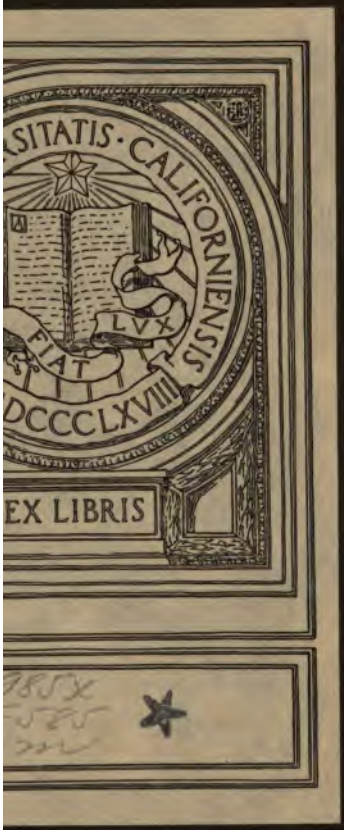
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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By

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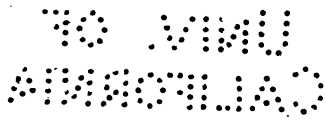

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

MANSIONS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Hildegarde Flanner

CHARACTERS

Harriet Wilde
Lydia Wilde [*her niece*]
Joe Wilde [*her nephew*]

Time: *Yesterday*

[*In a small town on the southern border of a Middle-Western state, stands an old brick house. The town is sufficiently near the Mason and Dixon line to gather about its ankles the rustle of ancient petticoats of family pride and to step softly lest the delicate sounds should be lost in a too noisy world. Even this old brick house seems reticent of the present, and gazing aloofly from its arched windows, barely suffers the main street to run past its gate. Many of the blinds are drawn, as if the dwelling and its inhabitants preferred to hug to themselves the old strength of the past rather than to admit the untried things of the present.*

The scene of the play is laid in the living-room. At the back is a wide door leading into the hallway beyond. At the left are French doors opening upon steps which might descend into the garden. At the right side of the room, and opposite the French doors, is a marble fireplace, while on either side of the fireplace and a little distant from it, is a tall window. To the left

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of the main door is a lounge upholstered in dark flowered tapestry, and to the right of the door is a mahogany secretary. Before the secretary and away from the hearth, an old-fashioned grand piano is placed diagonally, so that anyone seated at the instrument would be partially facing the audience. To the left of the French doors is a lyre table, on which stands a bowl of flowers. Above the rear door hangs the portrait of a man.

When the curtain rises Harriet Wilde is discovered standing precisely in the middle of her great-grandfather's carpet, which is precisely in the middle of the floor. To Harriet, ancestors are a passion, the future an imposition. Added to this, she is, in her way, intelligent. Therefore even before she speaks, you who are observant know that she is a formidable person. Her voice is low, even, and—what is the adjective? Christian. Yes, Harriet is a good woman. But don't let that mislead you.]

HARRIET *(calling)*

Lydia!

(Lydia comes into the room from the garden. In fact, she has been coming and going for more than fifteen years at the word of her aunt, although she is now twenty-seven. Her hands appear sensitive and, in some way, deprived and restless. She is dressed in a slim black gown which could be worn gracefully by no one else, although Lydia is not aware of this fact. In one hand she carries a pair of garden shears with handles painted scarlet; in the other a bright spray of portulaca; while over her

wrist is slung a garden hat. During their conversation Lydia moves fitfully about the room. Her manner changes from bitter drollery to a lonely timidness and from timidness to something akin to sulkiness. Harriet, whether seated or standing, gives the impression of having been for a long hour with dignity in the same position. She has no sympathy for Lydia nor any understanding of her. There is a wall of mistrust between the two. Both stoop to pick up stones, not to throw, but to build the wall even higher. Lydia employs by turns an attitude of cheerful cynicism and one of indifference, both planned to annoy her aunt, though without real malice. But this has become a habit.)

HARRIET

What are you doing, Lydia?

LYDIA

I had been trimming the rose hedge along the south garden, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET

But surely you can find something better to do than that, my dear.
(She cannot help calling people "my dear." It is because she is so superior.)
Someone might see in if you trim it too much. We want a bit of privacy in these inquisitive times.

LYDIA

The young plants on the edge of the walk needed sun.

HARRIET

Move the young plants. Don't sacrifice the rose hedge. *(Pausing as she straightens the candle in an old brass candlestick on the mantel.)* I—it seems to me that the furniture has been disarranged.

LYDIA

I was changing it a little this morning.

HARRIET

May I ask why?

LYDIA *(eagerly)*

Oh, just—just to be changing. Don't you think it is an improvement?

HARRIET *(coldly)*

It does very well. But I prefer it as it was. You know yourself that this room has never been changed since your grandfather died. *(Piously.)* And as long as I am mistress in this house it shall remain exactly as he liked it. *(Lydia looks spitefully at the portrait over the rear door.)*

HARRIET

(stepping to the window to the left of the fireplace and lowering the curtain to the middle of the frame)

The court house will be done before your brother is well enough to come downstairs, Lydia. How astonished he will be to see it completed.

LYDIA

Yes. But he would much rather watch while it is being done.

HARRIET

Well naturally. But from upstairs you can't see through the leaves of the maple tree. Why, Lydia, there isn't another tree for miles around with such marvelous foliage. Great-grandfather Wilde did not know, when he set out a sapling, that the county court house was to be built—almost in its very shadow.

LYDIA

You always did admire any kind of a family tree.

HARRIET

(as if speaking to an unruly child)
If Great-grandfather Wilde heard you say that—

LYDIA

(with a sudden flash of spirit which dies almost before she ceases to speak)
If Great-grandfather Wilde heard me say that, it may be—he would have the excellent sense to come back and chop off a limb or two, so that Joe could have sunlight in that little dark room up there, and see out.

HARRIET

(lifting her left hand and letting it sink upon her knee with the air of one who has suffered much, but can suffer more)
Lydia, my dear child, I am not responsible for your disposition this lovely morning. Moreover, this is a fruitless—

LYDIA

Fruitless, fruitless! *Why* couldn't he have

planted an apple tree? *(Throwing her head back slightly)* With blossoms in the spring and fruit in the summer—

HARRIET

I beg your pardon?

LYDIA *(wearily)*

With blossoms in the spring and fruit in the summer. *(Slowly and gazing toward the window)* Sounds rather pretty, doesn't it?

HARRIET *(unsympathetically)*

I do not understand what you are talking about.

LYDIA *(shortly)*

No.

HARRIET

It is always a source of sorrow to me, Lydia, that you show so little pride in any of the really noble men in the Wilde family.

LYDIA

I never knew them.

HARRIET

But you could at least reverence what I tell you.

LYDIA *(cheerfully)*

Well, I do think great-great-grandfather must have been a gay old person.

HARRIET

Gay old person!

LYDIA

Yes. The portulaca blooms so brightly on his grave. It's really not bad, having your family

buried in the front yard, if its dust inspires a flower like this.

HARRIET

I don't see why you insist upon picking those. They wilt immediately.

LYDIA

(looking appealingly at her aunt)
Oh, but they're so bright and gay! I can't keep my hands from them.

HARRIET

(scornfully smoothing her lace cuff)
Really?

LYDIA

(for the moment a trifle lonely)
Aunt Harriet, tell me why these dead old men mean so much to you!

HARRIET *(breathlessly)*

Dead—old—men? Why, Lydia! The Wildes came up from Virginia and were among the very first pioneers in this section. They practically made this town, and there is no better-known name here in the southern part of the state than ours. We—

LYDIA

Oh, yes. Of course, I've heard all that ever since I can remember. *(Assuming an attitude of pride)* We have the oldest and most aristocratic-looking house for miles around; the rose-hedge has bloomed for fifty years—it's very nearly dead, too; General Someone drank out of our well, or General Someone-Else drowned in it, I always forget which.

HARRIET

Lydia!

LYDIA *(soothingly)*

Oh, it doesn't make much difference which. That doesn't worry me. But what does, is how you manage to put a halo around all your fathers and grandfathers and—

HARRIET *(piously)*

Because they represent the noble traditions of a noble past.

LYDIA

What about the noble present?

HARRIET

(looking vaguely about the room)
I have not seen it.

LYDIA *(bitterly)*

No, you have not seen it. *(Turning to go)*

HARRIET

Just one moment, Lydia. I want to speak to you about your brother.

LYDIA *(quickly)*

Did the doctor say that Joe is worse?

HARRIET

No. In fact, the doctor won't tell me anything. He and Joe seem to have a secret. I can get nothing definite from the doctor at all. But what I feel it my duty to ask you, Lydia, is this: Tell me truthfully. Have you been speaking to Joe about—Heaven?

LYDIA

No. What a dreadful thing to even mention to a sick boy.

HARRIET

My dear, you are quite wrong. But someone has been misinforming him.

LYDIA

Really?

HARRIET

Lydia, I am very distressed. *(Slowly)* Your young brother holds the most unusual and sacrilegious ideas of immortality.

LYDIA *(indifferently)*

So?

HARRIET

No member of the Wilde family has ever held such ideas. It is quite irregular.

LYDIA

What does he think?

HARRIET

I don't know that I can tell you clearly. It is all so distasteful to me. But he declares—even in contradiction to my explanation—that after death we continue our earthly occupations—that is, our studies, our ambitions—

LYDIA

That is a wonderful idea.

HARRIET

(not noticing)

That if we die before accomplishing anything on earth, we have a chance in the after-life to work. Work! Imagine! In fact, he pictures Heaven as a place where people are—doing things.

LYDIA

(lifting her head and smiling)

Oh, that is beautiful—I mean, what did you tell him?

HARRIET *(reverently)*

I explained very carefully that Heaven is peace, peace. That the first thing we do when a dear one dies is to pray for the eternal rest of his soul.

LYDIA *(dully)*

Oh!

HARRIET

Yes, Lydia, I am glad to see that you share my distress. Why—he desecrates the conception of Heaven with workmen, artists, inventors, musicians—anything but angels.

LYDIA

Anything but angels. *(Smiles)* That is quite new, is it not? At least in this little town. Does Joe see himself building houses in Heaven?

HARRIET

That is the worst of it. Why, Lydia, even after I told him patiently that there were no

such things as architects in Heaven, he still insists that if he dies he is going to be one.

LYDIA *(startled)*
If he should die?

HARRIET *(decidedly)*
That is simply another foolish fancy. He has been confined so long that he gets restless and imagines these strange things.

LYDIA
Poor Joe!

HARRIET
Don't sympathize with him, please. I can't possibly allow him to become an architect.

LYDIA
Why not?

HARRIET
When the men in our family have been clergymen for four generations!

LYDIA
Yes, but they're dead now.

HARRIET
All the more reason for continuing the tradition.

LYDIA
There isn't one bit of money in it.

HARRIET *(proudly)*
When was a Wilde ever slave to money?

LYDIA *(sulkily)*

Certainly not since my day, and for a very, very good reason.

HARRIET

Well, at least we have sufficient to send Joe to college—and as a divinity student. And some day we will hear him preach in the house of the Lord.

LYDIA

He would rather build houses himself.

HARRIET

Simply a boyish whim. He's too young to really have a mind of his own. *(Confidently)* He will do what I tell him to.

LYDIA

He is very nearly nineteen, Aunt Harriet. Didn't you have a mind of your own when you were nineteen?

HARRIET

Certainly not. Yes, of course.
(Lydia laughs.)

HARRIET

(the hem of her skirt bellowing with dignity) This is entirely different. If you can't be polite, Lydia, you might at least stop laughing.

LYDIA *(still laughing)*

Oh, no! Oh, no! I take after my great-great-grandfather; I've just discovered it. At last I'm interested in the noble men of the Wilde

family. I know he liked to laugh. Look at the pertness of that! *(Holding up the portulaca.)*

HARRIET

(ignoring the flower)
Please give me your sun-hat, Lydia.

LYDIA *(demurely)*

Oh, are you going to look at the portulaca?

HARRIET

No; I am going to see what you have done to the rose-hedge. *(Going out through the French door.)*

LYDIA *(suddenly furious)*

Go look at your decrepit old rose-hedge! Go look at it! And I hope you get hurt on a thorn and bleed—yes, bleed—the way you make me bleed. I did cut a hole in it. I don't care who sees in—I want to see out! *(Looking toward the portrait and throwing the flowers on the floor)* Take your stupid flowers—take them. They don't do me any good. They're withering, they're withering!

(She goes to lean against the window and look toward the court house. As she stands there the door opens slowly and Joe, with blankets wrapped about him and trailing from his shoulders, comes unsteadily into the room. He carries paper and drawing materials. He is an eager boy, who seems always afraid of being overtaken. Lydia turns suddenly and starts toward the door. She stops in surprise as she sees her brother.)

LYDIA

Joe! My goodness! Whatever made you come downstairs? Aunt Harriet will be angry. Why, this might be awfully dangerous for you, Joe! How did you come to do such a thing? *(She helps him toward the lounge and arranges a cushion for him.)*

JOE

(sinking back, but facing the window)
I wanted to see how the court house was getting on. I can't see out of my window, you know.

LYDIA

Well, you see *(raising the blind)* they will soon have it done.

JOE *(delightedly)*

Yes, won't they, though! Look at those white pillars! That's worth something, I tell you. I'm glad I saw it.

LYDIA

What do you mean?

JOE

Just what I said.

LYDIA

Yes, but Joe—coming downstairs this way, when you have been really ill—

JOE

Oh, don't argue, Lydia. I have just been arguing with Aunt Harriet.

LYDIA

You'd better rest, then. You will have to, anyway, before you go back to your room. I see you plan to draw!

JOE

Yes, I've been lazy for so long. It's driving me crazy—never doing anything. I thought I'd copy some Greek columns this morning. Could you give me a large book to work on?

LYDIA

I'll look for one. *(Hunting)* Joe, what were you and Aunt Harriet arguing about?

JOE

Oh, nothing.

LYDIA

Yes, I've heard her do that before. But won't you tell me?

JOE

It wasn't anything, Lydia.

LYDIA

Here is what you want.
(She brings a large bound volume from the piano and places it upon his knees.)

JOE

Thank you. *(Settling himself to draw)* Where is she, by the way?

LYDIA

Out looking at the rose-hedge, where I cut a hole in it.

JOE

A hole in the sacred rose-hedge! Where did you suddenly get such courage? I've heard you talk about doing such things before, but you never really did them.

LYDIA *(timidly)*

I don't know, Joe, where I got my courage. I think it's leaving me, too.
(She puts out her hand as if trying to detain someone.)

JOE *(cheerfully)*

Come, stand by me. I have—I have a great deal of courage this morning.
(Lydia stands behind Joe and looks over his shoulder.)

JOE

(turning to her affectionately)
It's good I have you, Lydia. Aunt Harriet has a fit every time she sees me doing this.

LYDIA

Having them is part of her religion.

JOE

Well, this is mine. What is yours, Lydia? I don't believe I ever heard you say.

LYDIA *(shortly)*

I haven't any.

JOE

Sure enough?

LYDIA

(nodding, then speaking quite slowly)
I never did anything for anyone out of love, and I was never allowed to do anything I wanted to for joy. So I know that I have no religion.

JOE *(embarrassed)*

Never mind. Perhaps that will all come to you some day. *(Joe suddenly sits erect and looks first toward the French door and then toward the window)* I wonder what you will do when I go?

LYDIA

(following the direction of his gaze)
Where?

JOE

Oh—to college.

LYDIA

Perhaps when you go to college I'll do something Aunt Harriet doesn't think is regular.

JOE

What will it be?

LYDIA

How can I know now? How should I want to know?
(Joe looks over his shoulder toward the rear door of the room.)

LYDIA *(nervously)*

What do you see?

JOE

Nothing—nothing.

LYDIA

Then please stop looking at it.

JOE

(meeting her eyes for the fraction of a moment and then holding up the sheet of paper)
I am actually getting some form into this column. If I could only learn to design beautiful buildings—
(He puts his hand to his side in sudden pain.)

LYDIA

(not noting his action)
Why, of course you will some day.

JOE

I don't know. Sometimes I'm afraid I won't get the chance.

LYDIA

Oh, you'll be a man. You can ride over Aunt Harriet.
(Joe looks at his copy and crumbles it savagely. Suddenly he holds up his hand and listens.)

JOE

What was that bell?

LYDIA

I did not hear any.

JOE

I did.

LYDIA

It must have been the side door. Someone will answer it.

JOE

Do people often come by the side door?

LYDIA

Why, Joe, you know very well that the delivery boy always comes there.

JOE

Delivery?—I wonder—will it be delivery?

LYDIA

Joe, you're even odder than I am. Stop it. It doesn't do to have two in the family.

JOE *(laughing)*

Oh, just as you say. *(Looking at the book on his knee)* What is this big book?

LYDIA

Music.

JOE

(opening the book)
Why, it has your name in it.

LYDIA

It is my book.

JOE *(in surprise)*

Did you ever play the piano?

LYDIA *(turning aside)*

Yes.

JOE

(his face lighting up)
Play something now, *please.*

LYDIA

That piano has been locked for fifteen years.

JOE

Ever since mother died and you and I came here to live?

LYDIA

Yes. Haven't you ever wondered why it was never open?

JOE

I certainly have. But Aunt Harriet always avoided the subject and I could never get you to say anything about it.

LYDIA

By the time I had tried it for two years, I knew better.

JOE

But why is it locked?

LYDIA

Because I neglected my duties. I played the piano when I should have been studying, and I played when I should have been hemming linen, and I played when I should have been learning psalms.

JOE

But surely when you grew older—when you were through school—

LYDIA

No. I lied to her once about it. She made me promise not to touch the piano, and left it open on purpose to see what I would do. And I played and she heard me. So when I denied it—*(shrugging her shoulders)* you see, after that, to have let me go on, playing and undisciplined—why, it would have meant the loss of my soul. *(Very pleasantly)* It would have meant hell, at least, Joe dear, and I don't know what else. Aunt Harriet has always been so careful about what I learned.

JOE *(angrily)*

But surely you are old enough now to do what you want to! I'll ask her myself if—

LYDIA *(alarmed)*

Oh, no, Joe! Please, please don't do that. I should be frightened, really. It is a matter of religion with her.

JOE

And don't you know how to play any longer?

LYDIA

Yes, some. I sneak into the church when no one is there and play on that piano. *(She walks to the instrument, and sitting down before it, rubs her palms lovingly across the closed lid)* When you were away six months ago, this was opened to be tuned for those young cousins of hers who visited. They were lively young girls, and the first thing they did every morning was to go to the piano. They would have asked questions if it had been locked, and Aunt Harriet hates inquisitiveness like poison.

JOE

Where is the key?

LYDIA

I don't know where it is now. She has probably thrown it away. It would be just like her to do it. *(Changing her manner suddenly and rising)* Joe, wouldn't you like a cup of tea?

JOE *(earnestly)*

No, I wouldn't. Sit down, Lydia.
(Lydia sits down again. Joe starts to speak, but stops to look about the room.)

LYDIA

Joe, what *are* you looking for?

JOE *(slowly and reluctantly)*

I can't get over the feeling that I am expecting someone.

LYDIA

Who is it?

JOE *(evasively)*

I don't know. Someone I never saw before.

LYDIA *(laughing)*

An unknown visitor knocks before he comes in the door.

JOE

I'm not sure that this one will.
(He closes his eyes wearily and puts his palms before them.)

LYDIA *(gently)*

Joe, you're tired. Please go upstairs.

JOE

Not quite yet. *(Eagerly)* Lydia, you know what Aunt Harriet and I were arguing about. I saw it in your eyes.

LYDIA

Of course. It's a beautiful idea.

JOE *(excitedly)*

Then you think I'm right?

LYDIA

(looking at the piano)
I hope to heaven you are.

JOE *(pleading)*

Then do something for me, Lydia, please.

LYDIA

What?

JOE

I've been so worried lately to think—how awful it is if a person dies without accomplishing anything.

LYDIA

I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

JOE *(hastily)*

I wasn't speaking for myself. I meant, just generally, you know. But what I have been figuring out is this—so long as you believe that you can go on working after you leave here, it's all right, isn't it?

LYDIA *(hesitant)*

Yes.

JOE

(thoughtfully and as though on unaccustomed ground)

But when you first go over, you are rather weak—

LYDIA

You mean your soul?

JOE *(speaking hurriedly)*

Yes, that's it. And you mustn't be worried by grief or any force working against you from the people you've left behind.

LYDIA

Yes, I follow you. Where did you learn all this?

JOE

In a book at the library.

LYDIA *(uncertainly)*

I think I have heard of some theory—

JOE *(impatiently)*

I'm not bothering about theories. I haven't got time for them. In fact, I'd almost forgotten about the whole idea until the other day. Something the doctor told me set me thinking. He is really a splendid man, Lydia.

LYDIA *(indifferently)*

Yes, I've always thought so. But what is it you want me to do for you, Joe? Aunt Harriet may come in any moment.

JOE

(looking at Lydia very fixedly and speaking slowly)

Just this. When I die, don't let Aunt Harriet pray for my soul.

LYDIA

Joe!

JOE

Yes, I mean it. She has a powerful mind. And she would pray for my eternal rest and I might not be strong enough to stand against her.

LYDIA

(starting toward the rear door)

I won't listen to you any longer. It is wrong to talk and think about death.

JOE

Lydia, please! It means so much to me. Listen just one second. I know I'm not very good, but Aunt Harriet would be sure to try to make an angel out of me. And if I thought I had to sit on those everlasting gold steps and twang an everlasting gold harp forever and forever—Lydia, I'd go crazy—I'd go crazy!

(His voice rises to a scream and he sinks back gasping.)

LYDIA

(rushing to his side)

I promise anything. Only don't excite yourself this way. For Heaven's sake, Joe, be quiet!

JOE *(insisting)*

But don't let her pray. And make her give you the key to the piano, and you play something

so I can go out in harmony. Harmony—do you understand that, Lydia? Harmony. That's the word they used so often in the book. Do you promise surely?

LYDIA *(tearfully)*

Yes, but Joe, you're not going to die. You're not! The doctor would have told us something about it.

JOE

Of course I'm not going to. Not until I get good and ready. Don't be silly. But remember, when it does happen, you must not cry. That is very hard on souls that are just starting out.

LYDIA

I—I can see how it might be.

JOE

You won't forget to smile?

LYDIA

No.

JOE

But smile now, for practice.

LYDIA

(trying to smile, but failing)
Oh, I can smile for you easily enough; but don't frighten me like that again.

JOE

I'll try not to.

LYDIA

(suddenly facing him)
Do you expect Aunt Harriet to live as long as you do?

JOE

(with a second's hesitation)
Yes, I'm quite sure she will. The Wildes have the habit of living long, you know.

LYDIA

But why shouldn't you live longer than she, since you are younger?

JOE

Oh, I don't know. I'd rather like to get ahead of her in something, though.

LYDIA

Well, you do believe in preparation. I can't see why you are being so beforehanded, but if it gives you any pleasure to scare me to death—

JOE

It certainly does, Lydia. And just one thing more I want of you.

LYDIA

What?

JOE *(rather shyly)*

Take the Bible and read something to bind the promise. Just any verse.

LYDIA

This is becoming too solemn. I don't care for it.

(She approaches the lyre table, upon which, of course, is a Bible, and opens the book.)

JOE

Then I'll be ready to go.

LYDIA

(looking at him sharply)
Go?

JOE

Upstairs.
(Lydia turns the leaves of the Bible.)

JOE

This will be our secret, Lydia. *(He leans forward and looks out the French door, then turns to her impatiently)* What are you waiting for?

LYDIA

Yes, Joe, our secret. Let me see. Mother was always very fond of John. *(Joe makes a movement of pain, which Lydia does not see)* Oh, I have the very thing to read you. How strange! It sounds like a prophecy for you.

JOE

Read it. *(Steps are heard in the garden. Joe looks up in alarm)* Who is that coming?

LYDIA

Only Aunt Harriet.
(Harriet Wilde comes in through the French door.)

HARRIET

I managed, Lydia, to some extent, to repair the damage which you—*(Seeing Joe, she stops in surprise)* Actually, Joe downstairs! But I

felt certain this morning, my dear, when you were arguing in that unheard-of fashion, that you must be better.

LYDIA *(hastily)*

I don't think it has hurt him to come down, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET

On the contrary, I think it has done him good.

JOE

I should say it did, Aunt Harriet—you don't know how much— *(Again he looks toward the rear door)*

HARRIET

What is it, Joe dear? Is the doctor coming again?

JOE

No, I hardly think the doctor will need to come again.

HARRIET

Why, how gratifying. I am so glad.
(Joe closes his eyes wearily.)

LYDIA

Aunt Harriet, Joe was just about to go up to his room, but he asked me to read something to him from the Bible first. I opened to this passage. Won't you read it to him?

HARRIET

Yes, I will indeed. It gives me great happiness, Joe, to see you really showing a desire for the holy word of the Scripture.

(Harriet takes the Bible from Lydia and stands in the light by the French door. She faces slightly away from Joe. Lydia walks to the rear door and stands directly beneath the portrait. She conceals a smile and looks expectantly toward her aunt.)

(Reading): Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I—

JOE

(sitting erectly and interrupting)

Many mansions — many mansions — Lydia, Aunt Harriet—who said I couldn't build hou—houses—in—

(He sinks back. Harriet does not look at him, but shuts the Bible with displeasure and moves forward to place it on the table.)

HARRIET *(coldly)*

That is positive sacrilege, Joe.

(Lydia laughs triumphantly and steps to Joe's side, walking on her tip-toes and pretending to dance, pleased at her aunt's discomfiture.)

LYDIA

(stopping by Joe and bending over him)

Didn't I say it was a prophecy?

(Joe does not answer nor open his eyes. Lydia takes his hand and then drops it in fear.)

LYDIA

Aunt Harriet, come here quickly!

(Harriet comes swiftly and stoops over Joe. She feels of his pulse and lays her hand against his heart.)

HARRIET

Joe! Joe!

LYDIA

(moving distractedly toward the door)
I'll call the doctor.

HARRIET

(standing very straight and twisting her handkerchief)
It will do no good, Lydia. Joe has gone. This is the way your father went and your grandfather—all the men in the Wilde family. But this is irregular. They never died so young.
(Lydia covers her face with her hands.)

HARRIET

And he seemed so well. Why didn't the doctor—Lydia! This was their secret—this is what they wouldn't tell me!

LYDIA

Secret? Which secret?
(She looks at Joe and clasps her hands in anguish. Harriet kneels by the lounge and begins to pray.)

HARRIET

Dear Lord, I do beseech thee to grant peace and eternal rest to thy child come home to thee. Grant that he may forever sit in thy presence—
(Lydia, slowly realizing what her aunt is saying, runs to her side and makes her rise.)

LYDIA

Stop that! Stop it, I say! You worried him enough when he was alive. Now that he's dead, let him do what he wants to.

HARRIET

Lydia! You have lost your senses! Be calm, be calm. *(Harriet crosses to the table and picks up the Bible)* Come, we will read a few verses and have faith that—

LYDIA

(snatching the Bible from her aunt)
No you shan't! Let him alone. Oh, Joe, Joe, I'm trying! Be brave! You knew all along. You were watching—you were expecting. Why didn't you tell me? *(Lydia looks from Joe to the piano and back to Joe. She composes herself and puts her hands on her aunt's shoulders)* Where is the key to the piano?

HARRIET *(horrified)*

You wouldn't touch the piano in the presence of death?

LYDIA

Where is the key?

HARRIET

(unable to fathom Lydia's strange demand) It is gone. I don't know where it is.

LYDIA

Don't you? Don't you? *(Sliding her hands toward her aunt's throat and turning toward Joe)* Be brave, Joe. *(Speaking to her aunt)* Then if the key is gone I shall have to take the fire-tongs.
(Lydia steps toward the fireplace.)

HARRIET

Lydia! Don't touch them! What are you about?

LYDIA

(coming again to her aunt and placing her hands on her shoulders)
I want—that—key. And I want it quickly.
(They look squarely into one another's eyes.)

HARRIET *(uncertainly)*

I can't give it to you now. I will never give it to you.

LYDIA

No? *(Almost breaking down)* Joe, why didn't you tell me? *(Walking toward the hearth)* Very well, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET

(passing her hand over her eyes in terror)
Wait! Look in that old vase on the mantel. No—the one that we never use—with the crack in it—
(Lydia takes down the vase and tilts it. A key falls on the hearth with a ringing sound. She picks it up and quickly opens the piano.)

HARRIET

To think that this should happen in my house. Lord, what have I done to deserve it?

LYDIA

(seating herself at the piano)
Joe, this sounds like wind blowing through willow trees. *(She plays softly)* Good-by, Joe; good-by, dear. Good luck!

HARRIET

(pulling down the blinds on either side of the fireplace)
Lydia, have you no religion?

LYDIA

(controlling her agitation)
Yes—I have.

HARRIET

(looking from Lydia to Joe)
I can't understand. Joe, poor Joe.

LYDIA

Let not your heart be troubled. . . . *(Continuing to play)* I'm smiling, Joe. I'm laughing, Joe. Be strong. . . .
(Harriet is stupefied. She starts toward Lydia, but stops. She lifts the Bible from the table, but replaces is hastily, as Lydia looks across at her.)

LYDIA *(dreamily)*

In my Father's house are many mansions.
(Harriet looks to the portrait above the door, as if for help.)

LYDIA

If it were not so—I would have told you—
(And Lydia looks mystically out into space and continues to play while

The Curtain Falls.)

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